

# COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

For Immediate Release  
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### **Government Reform Examines a 'Furtive Killer'**

*Chairman Davis to Review Federal Government's Efforts to  
Combat Hepatitis C, Which Has Infected 4 Million Americans*

**What:** Government Reform Committee Hearing, "Stalking a Furtive Killer: A Review of the Federal Government's Efforts to Combat Hepatitis C"

**When:** TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2004, 2:00 P.M.

**Where:** ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

#### **Background:**

Most people probably do not realize that hepatitis C is now the most common blood-borne viral infection in the United States, affecting nearly 4 million people, with an estimated 25,000 new cases diagnosed each year. It is the leading cause of death among those with HIV/AIDS, as well as the cause for 40-60 percent of chronic liver disease cases, which are now the 10th leading cause of death among adults in the United States.

Efforts to fight hepatitis C are hindered by several significant factors. First, there is no vaccine to shield against the hepatitis C virus (HVC). Second, HVC infection is usually asymptomatic, meaning most people with the virus do not know they have it. Thus, the virus can go undetected for decades, revealing itself only once serious liver damage has occurred. Unlike the virus HIV, the hepatitis C virus can live outside the body for up to 14 days, and no disinfectant agents will destroy it.

Those with a history of intravenous drug use are at the highest risk for HVC infection. Other risk groups include: those who received a blood transfusion or solid organ transplant before July 1992, when effective blood screening methods were implemented; those who received blood-clotting agents prior to 1987, when virus inactivating procedures were developed; healthcare workers and those who come into contact with blood in employment settings; and children born to an HVC infected mother. About 10 percent of

people with HVC infection have no recognized source of infection. Roughly 15 percent of HVC infection is attributed to sexual contact.

At Tuesday's hearing, the Committee on Government Reform will hear from medical and public health experts, in addition to hearing the personal story of a teenage girl from Fairfax County, Va., whose father has hepatitis C. Erika Stein, a student at Robinson Secondary School and part of the school's DECA program (an association of marketing students) has helped lead a marketing campaign, "Hepatitis C: America's Unknown Terror," to raise awareness and get more federal resources allocated for prevention and research of the disease.

The hearing will also take a look back and see what progress has been made since 1998, when the Government Reform Subcommittee on Human Resources held a hearing on hepatitis C. At that hearing, former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop recommended several specific points of action, including: more public education, specifically targeting high-risk groups; primary care physician training; better reporting to monitor hepatitis C and prevent liver disease; a focus on prisoners with hepatitis C; and increased funding for treating co-infections of hepatitis C with HIV / AIDS.

## **WITNESSES**

### Panel One:

**Dr. Rima Khabbaz, M.D., Associate Director of Epidemiologic Science,  
National Center for Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**  
**Dr. Lawrence Deyton, MSPH, M.D., Chief Consultant, Public Health Strategic  
Healthcare Group, Department of Veterans Affairs**  
**Dr. Jay Hoofnagle, M.D., Liver Disease Research Branch, Division of Digestive  
Diseases and Nutrition, National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive Kidney Diseases,  
National Institutes of Health**

### Panel Two:

**Dr. Michael Rudman, M.D., Founder, Frederick County Hepatitis Clinic, Inc.**  
**Ann Jesse, Founding Executive Director, Hep C Connection**  
**Erika Stein, Robinson Secondary School DECA (Distributive Education Clubs  
of America) student, whose father has Hepatitis C**  
**John R. Niemiec, First Vice President, Fairfax County Professional Fire  
Fighters and Paramedics**

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